

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2010

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Pelargonium rodneyanum Magenta Stork's-bill
- Photo by Noel Young

PRESIDENTS REPORT FOR 2009

2009 was a very good year for our club. We had a full and productive programme, with a varied group of speakers. We introduced some innovation and re-introduced a previous programme which had gone into recess. Where possible we matched up field trips with speakers' subjects. For the first time (known to me) we had the entire speaker programme organised by the start of the year. This worked well and we had only one speaker drop out due to illness.

As usual we began the year with the Dawn Breakfast. Even though this entails an early start there was a turn-up of about ten enthusiastic twitchers at Expedition Pass. Following the AGM Trevor Pescott spoke on the subject of mammals. Next day we explored the area known as the 'Old Diamond Hill Urban Parkland'. March brought us Richard Hughes of the 'Wild Country Project'. This was followed by field trip to Crusoe Reservoir at Kangaroo Flat. In April we were promised that Dr. Julian Hollis would give a controversial talk on 'Climate Change from the Geological Perspective'. We were not disappointed. On the Saturday field trip Julian showed us a number of geological sites around Daylesford.

In May Dr. David Hollands delighted and amused us with stories about his early attempts at bird photography. His subject was 'Owls and other Night Birds'. For the field trip we went to Smith's Reef. Simon Kennedy, in June, told us of his research into the Swift Parrot. Next day his grandmother (Rita Mills) took us to Sandon where approximately 30 swift parrots were sighted.

Geoff Nevill of the Department of Sustainability and Environment spoke to us in July about the Threatened Orchid Recovery Programme. The field trip the following day was cancelled due to inclement weather. In August we were treated to a 'panorama spectacular' by Michael Marmach who showed us brilliant images of the Victorian high country. This was followed with a field trip to Wattle Flat, taking the place of the one abandoned the previous month.

At the September meeting Dr. Beth Gott was scheduled to speak to us about 'Wild Food' and was to lead us on a search for same on the field trip.

Unfortunately she cancelled due to illness, and Ern Perkins (who was scheduled to speak in October) stepped in at very short notice, treating us to 'A Celebration of Eucalypts'. In place of the wild food search we went to Whipstick.

The October speaker gap was admirably filled (again at short notice) by Gary Gibson, who spoke about earthquakes. This subject was most topical as there had just been a series of earth tremors in Victoria. For the field trip we went in search of two rare greenhood orchids in locations around Maldon. On the Sunday prior to the field trip a few of us had accompanied DSE staff to locations where the Sutton Grange Greenhood orchid is known to grow in the Nuggetty Ranges.

Our final speaker for the year was Dr. Mary Cole whose subject was 'Mycorrhizae and Environmental Health'. The field trip was abandoned because of low turn-up and unpleasant weather conditions. The 'Show and Tell' night in December was followed by a field trip to Rise and Shine.

Following some relaxation of the previously increased stringency of regulations by VicRoads for the roadside clean-ups, which had caused us to discontinue this activity, we again became involved in the programme. The first of the two clean-ups for 2009 showed the need for the programme by the extent of the rubbish collected. Geoff Harris became the co-ordinator, taking over from Hans van Gemert. The 'Broom Pull' in the Copper Butterfly section of the Botanic Gardens is an on-going (and seemingly endless) task.

The Wildflower Walks remain popular with club members. This year we conducted four under guidance from various leaders; we had average attendance of 20-25 people. Again this year we participated in the 'Annual Bird Count', under the leadership of Chris Morris. Sadly there has been a diminution in both number of species sighted and of abundance within species. Debbie Worland keeps us informed on the state of the Swift Parrot. She is expecting to produce a CD later in 2010. Ern Perkins keeps the publications current and supplied to the library and the market building. A small sub-committee of Richard Piesse, George Broadway, Ern Perkins and Rita Mills has been working on the production of a brochure of local flora/fauna. This is expected to be launched early in 2010. Alison Rowe has contributed by up-dating the web-site. We have also been involved in submissions to local and state governments.

Sadly this year we lost another member with the death of Ken Cross on April 1st, aged 76. Ken had been a long-time member of the club and he and his wife Margery travelled from Macedon (and latterly from Gisborne) to attend club meetings and field trips. Although Ken is greatly missed, it is pleasing to see that Margery continues to attend meetings and outings.

I would like to thank all members of the committee for their continued support; Denis Hurley vice-president, George Broadway secretary, Nigel Harland treasurer and Noel Young newsletter editor. All other members of the committee and the behind-the-scenes workers, Helen Morris supper and Natasha Harris Newsletter posting, contributed in their various ways to keep the club and its activities both viable and vibrant

Natalie De Maccus

Buloke exclosures at the Rise and Shine

Frances Cincotta - Newstead Landcare Group

I am delighted that the CFNC tried out the new 3km loop walk that has been developed recently by Newstead Landcare Group in the Rise and Shine Bushland Reserve at Clydesdale. In the report in the February newsletter Natalie commented on the fencing we have done to protect a small population of *Allocasuarina*. I would like you to know that the species being protected is *Allocasuarina luehmannii* (Buloke). It is easy to distinguish this species from its close relative, *Allocasuarina verticillata* (Drooping She-oak) because the former has foliage that is pointed upwards whereas the latter has branchlets which mostly droop down. The only time they are difficult to tell apart is when they are young seedlings as foliage in both points upwards when they are young.

The cones are very different too - the cones on *Allocasuarina luehmannii* are small, with only 2 or 3 rows of valves (from which the seeds drop), while the cones of *Allocasuarina verticillata* are large, with many rows of pointy valves. Excellent line drawings of the cones can be found in *Native Trees and Shrubs of South-eastern Australia* by Leon Costermans which a lot of members would have on their bookshelves. Cones are usually only found on female trees of the two species, and are not held on the tree all year round so I think the direction of the branchlets is a better guide for distinguishing these two local species which are the only members of the *Casuarinacea* family found naturally within Shire of Mount Alexander.

Laminated copies of the walk notes are available at start of walk in the Rise and Shine. Here's what they say about the exclosures (point 11):

"On the far side of the race, a fence encloses a stand of Bulokes, the trees with long, needle-like "leaves" (these are actually branches – the leaves are tiny serrations at the joints between small segments of the branches). Their seeds only germinate after 2 consecutive years of good rains and the young plants are favourite food for wallabies. The fence will help to ensure that the next generation of bulokes gets to grow up. Bulokes were favoured by the Jaara people for making boomerangs".

There are two main exclosure plots and a couple of quite small ones. We're protecting about 30 trees and seedlings. There is rabbit netting on all fences so that any seedlings or suckers that occur in the plots will be protected from grazing from both rabbits and wallabies. I think the first fence went up in 2005 and the large one near the gravel pit was erected in 2006.

Anyone who missed the CFNC excursion, or the launch of our walk in November 2009, would be welcome to go to the Rise and Shine any time to check out the walk. It is particularly good in Spring when swathes of a number of different orchids and other wildflowers can be seen. Directions: travel from Newstead to Strangways (towards Guildford), then take the Daylesford Rd heading south. Approx. 3km down Newstead-Daylesford Rd, turn right into Ramsays Lane and go 600m. At start of walk (on right) there is a picnic shelter and a sign on the gate saying '1.5 hour walk, 3km.'

Old Post Office Hill, Chewton

Geraldine Harris

At our AGM in February, Ian O'Halloran talked about the work being carried out in the 22.6 hectare area near the Chewton School that once included the old Chewton Tennis Courts, two or three tip sites and the parking area behind the Senior Citizens building in Chewton. This area, once marked as suitable for light industry and residential development has been acquired for the community, with the help of the DSE and Land Victoria, and is being developed with grants from the North Central Catchment Management Association and the Bush Gardening Programme by members of the Post Office Hill Action Group.

The name for the project comes from foundation structures of the old Post Office and the Old Post Office Hill Mine in the area that, until recently, lay buried under a thicket of gorse, blackberries, pines and environmental weeds such as Cootamundra Wattles and Calistemons in an area of neglected bushland.

Grooming with large equipment and exploration has exposed the ruins mentioned above and also a natural stone bridge, aboriginal wells, tracks, reef exposure and native plants such as Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha*, Cranberry Heath *Austroloma humifusum*, Honey Pots *Acrotriche serrulata*, Gorse Bitter-pea *Daviesia ulicifolia*, Yellow stars *Hypoxis vaginata*, Matted Bush-pea *Pultenaea pedunculata*, Fairy Wax-flower *Philotheca verrucosa*, Hedge Wattle *A paradoxa*, Gold-dust Wattle *A acinacea*, Lomandra sp, Twining Fringe-lily *Thysanotus patersonii*, Rosemary Grevillea *Grevillea rosmarinifolia*, Coffee Bush *Cassinia arcuata*, greenhood orchids, and daisies

Some of the area remains under threat from a couple of adverse possession claims and proposed drilling exploration by Wattle Gully Mine so there is still a lot of work to be done. However, Ian's photos showed the advances being made in the area and he conveyed the importance of such projects in fostering community involvement from residents, each helping in their own individual way.

Post Office Hill, Chewton, Field Trip

Rita Mills

It seemed that after Ian O'Halloran's talk after the Annual Meeting, people wanted to see for themselves what had been done and what the Post Office Hill area looked like, as there was a good number of members along for the afternoon.

Ian took us to several sites, explaining, answering questions and telling anecdotes, and the picture grew clearer as we explored.

There is still much to be done, particularly for getting rid of Gorse, but they have contractors who use shields around the Gorse plants as they spray to avoid contamination of wanted plants, and in the badly overgrown areas they are using a Groomer.

One of the things that was very encouraging was the number of native seedlings

growing in all sorts of situations, even in gravel and shale. Some ripping has been done to encourage regeneration. Several of us noted that tiny leaves were appearing on what looked like short thick stumps of almost dead Golden Wattles. Its wonderful what a difference rain makes.



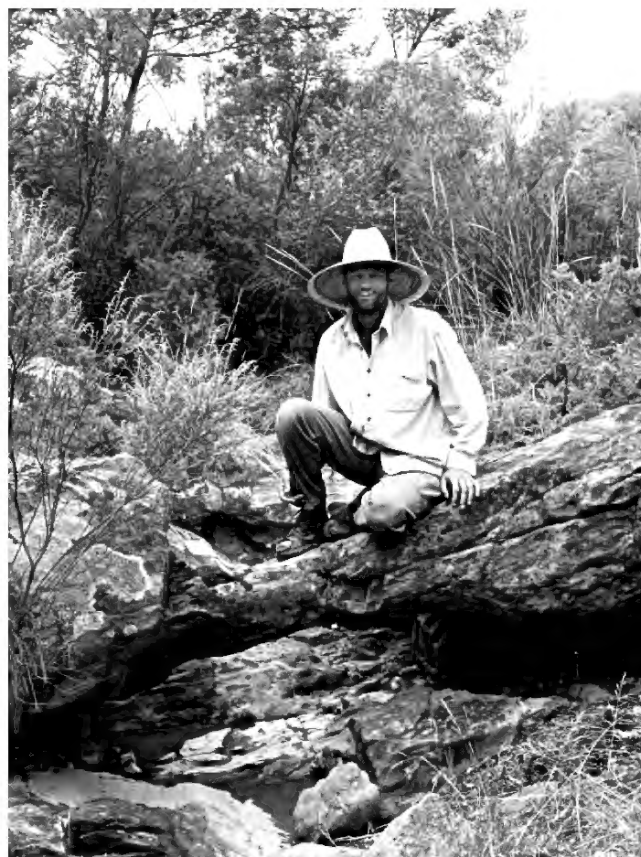
Ian O'Halloran addresses CFNC members in front of impressive re-growth in the Chewton bushland

Not many plants were in flower at this time of year, of course, but Box Mistletoe was in full flower, while Wiry Mistletoe was just finishing, and will soon be developing its beautiful pink fruit. After the rain Grey Box is really starting to burst into flower, and some of the planted Sugar Gums had blossom, too. Other plants noted in flower were Cherry Ballart (as long as you had your binocs reversed or a hand lens to see them) Sweet Bursaria, a single flower of *Goodenia blackiana*, some tiny flowers of an *Oxalis*

species and a few Gorse flowers, too. There were buds forming on both the Cranberry Heath and the Drooping Cassinia.

A Wallaby was spotted, but there weren't many birds about, though there were plenty of New Holland Honeyeaters - perhaps the reason there weren't many others - and a couple of piping calls that sounded like Treecreepers were heard.

As we got back to the school we spotted a flock of Galahs, and a Striated Pardalote started to call. All in all, not a birdo's afternoon, but that didn't matter. We came away with a much better understanding of what Ian and the rest of the group are hoping to achieve. Afterwards several of us stayed behind, had the essential afternoon tea, and sat chatting in the shade of the Sugar Gums near the school for another three quarters of an hour. A most enjoyable afternoon as far as I was concerned.



Ed Oram on the natural stone bridge

[photos by Noel Young]

Tyto Wetlands Visit

Neville Cooper

My family and I travelled to Ingham, QLD, for Christmas, and while we were there we made sure we visited the Tyto Wetlands, just on the edge of town. The Tyto Wetlands is home to more than 200 species of birds, plus numerous butterflies, mammals and reptiles. It is the home of the Eastern Grass Owl - (Tyto Capensis) – which is where it gets its name. Unfortunately we didn't get to see any, because it was too early in the season.

On a hot and steamy morning we ventured out to the wetlands with hats, a map, some water and food, and three energetic children. They were very well behaved throughout the morning, but it does make it slightly difficult to concentrate fully on observing everything. We saw loads of birds, butterflies and friendly wallabies. We were also very lucky to be the first 'official' tourists to climb up the new observation tower near the brand new Information Centre - (we had to wait for them to cut down the tape for us) - and were very impressed with all the new work done around the Wetlands and at the Centre itself. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly, and were worn out by the time we'd finished. We decided to return the next day, without the children.

Late afternoon, Beth and I left the kids with their grandparents and set off again. We had more time to just sit and observe and were rewarded with some special sightings, including several Bush Stone-Curlews and a shy Hydrome (native Water Rat), swimming around in the swamp foraging for food. We met Jonathan Munro from Wild Watch Australia (www.wildwatch.com.au) and his wife, who were taking photos (including the Hydrome) and learned a lot from our enthusiastic chats.

At the Tyto Wetlands, there is a fantastic bird hide in amongst the Bulrush where we spent a good deal of our time watching the Crakes walking on the Lotus leaves. There are also some great viewing platforms showing off the different facets of the wetlands. As it became dark we walked to the Owl platform where we heard Barking Owls and Southern Boobooks. We didn't have a very good spotlight, so we didn't get to see any. But we did see thousands of Fruit Bats filling the moonlit sky, which was an awesome sight indeed. Some were flying so low we had to occasionally duck! There were also some smaller, very fast bats, which we couldn't identify.

We got home exhausted from our adventure, but were extremely satisfied with our two visits. Even though we couldn't identify all the birds we saw (especially all the little brown birds), the list of birds we did identify was the longest we'd ever put together. Over the next couple of days, we had a lot of fun looking in our bird books and showing the kids what we saw. We definitely recommend experiencing the Tyto Wetlands for yourself, if you're ever up that way (I know Rita Mills has been before), and we very much look forward to going again next time ourselves.

Our Ingham Bird List

Darter, White-faced Heron, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Nankeen Night Heron, Black-necked Stork (Jabiru), Sacred Ibis, Straw-necked Ibis, Magpie

Goose, Wandering Whistling-Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Green Pygmy-Goose, Black-shouldered Kite, Pacific Baza, Black Kite, Spotless Crake, White-browed Crake, Comb-crested Jacana, Bush Stone-Curlew, Masked Lapwing, Latham's Snipe, Black-fronted Dotteral, Pied Imperial Pigeon, Spotted Turtle-Dove, Peaceful Dove, Red-tailed Black Cockatoo, Rainbow Lorikeet, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Welcome Swallow, Varied Triller, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Red-backed Fairy-Wren, Brown Honeyeater, Mistletoebird, House Sparrow, Crimson Finch, Zebra Finch, Common Mynah, Yellow Oriole, Olive-backed Oriole, White-breasted Woodswallow, Magpie-lark, Yellow Figbird.

UPCOMING EVENTS

A talk on **woodland birds** will be given by

Professor Andrew Barnett and Chris Tzaros

March 11th at 7.30 pm

at the Newstead Community centre

The SEANA autumn camp

is to be held over the weekend of Friday 19th to Monday 22nd March

Hosted by FNC Ballarat

At the Pax Hill activity and conference centre (Scout camp)

450 Spencer St, Ballarat East

Registration from 4.30 pm Friday 19th at Pax Hill

Further information and booking form on the SEANA website

Observations

At the February meeting:-

- ◆ A male Superb Parrot seen on Stevens track – Barbara Guerin
- ◆ Geraldine Harris saw three Ringtail Possums in the trees outside the house one evening.
- ◆ Christine Kilmartin reported a raptor, possibly a Peregrine Falcon with chicks (calling) near the Yellow House in Lyttleton St.
- ◆ [March] White naped and Brown headed Honeyeaters have disappeared lately - Denis Hurley

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club
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Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

March 2010

Fri Mar 13 meeting: PETER MARRIOTT : Moths

Sat Mar 14 field trip: Moth trapping with Peter Marriott

Fri Apr 9 meeting: JULIA BROWN: Connecting Country

Sat Apr 10 field trip: Lerderderg River

Fri May 14 meeting: NEIL MARRIOTT

Sat May 15 field trip: Sailors Falls

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Natalies; 65 Johnstone Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2010

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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